

# The INQUIRER

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80p

the voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7744 17 April 2010



# Creating a bubble of trust

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# Young Unitarians living their faith

## Unitarian weekend away

Seniors gathered for a weekend at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow. Photo by James Barry



## Sunday School Celebration

Bradford Unitarians celebrated their anniversary on 4 April and the children received books for their Sunday school attendance. Neville Kenyon, then-vice president of the General Assembly, (back row, left) presented the books and the whole congregation gathered round. Photo by Jim Timiney



## General Assembly Meetings

Young participants create masks for the story they told at the 2009 Anniversary service held at Chester. Photo by John Hewerdine.



More photos on pages 11 and 12.



National Youth Co-ordinator reports

# Creating more opportunities

Sunday Clubs meeting in church halls, children learning about themselves and their faith as they pursue Chalice Awards. And, the chance to form lifelong friendships at weekends away. Opportunities for young people across the denomination abound. Here, **John Harley** writes of the 'bubble of trust' created by youth weekenders.

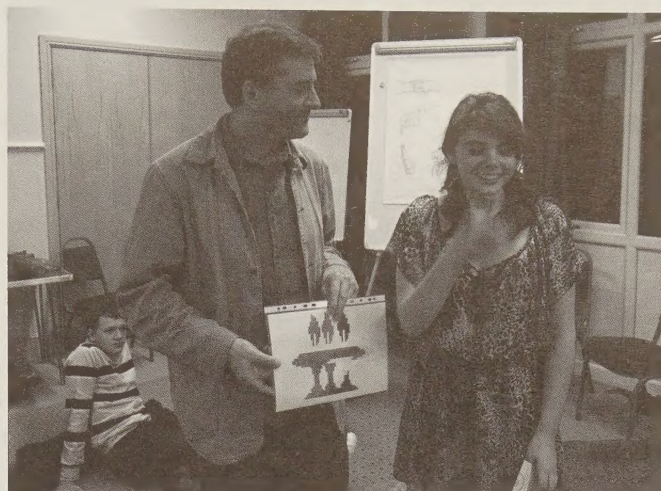
At the most recent Inter/Senior Weekend held at The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow in February, Jen Hazel led a beautiful bridging ceremony to welcome young people who were journeying from Inters to Seniors and to provide an opportunity to say goodbye to Seniors who would be leaving us, after – in some cases – 10 years of youth weekends. Speeches were made from the young folk, expressing what Hucklow means to them; some said that we build 'a great big bubble of trust' that they do not experience anywhere else, others said that the Hucklow weekends provide a relaxing space where they can question and explore the big issues of life in a fun way. The feeling of connection and togetherness in that space bowled me over and there were many tears streaming down the faces of young people and leaders alike.

The ceremony reached a fitting crescendo with a spontaneous group hug involving around 30 young people and 11 leaders. (Photo on cover) I was relieved that when the hug had dispersed there were no crushed people on the ground like the aftermath of a rugby scrum!

It is during these special, timeless moments that I know we are doing something right by keeping the Unitarian Youth Programme alive, growing and kicking for future generations. Our enthusiastic team of leaders aim to organise weekends for Juniors (7-11 year olds), Inters (11-14) and Seniors (14-17) which combine creative and outdoor activities with workshops that explore a whole raft of subjects including self-esteem, beliefs and values and leadership skills.

Other crucial ingredients for Inter and Senior Weekends are bubble groups and credo groups respectively (small sharing groups) and circle time for reflection and worship. Above all we try and give our young people a sense of real community and a supportive space where they can discover who they are and make lifelong friendships.

Since I started the role of Youth Coordinator in November 2005 I have been beavering away at a number of challenges and goals in order to expand the youth work we do. I am aware that our youth work has a centre of gravity in the north of England and so I have been trying to develop youth initiatives in the South. First we had 'Blah' weekends at an outdoor adventure centre near Rochester and over the last two years we have been running Unikids (for the 7-14 age group) weekends at



John Harley does a presentation at Senior Weekend in November. Photo by James Barry

Youth Hostels. The next holiday – 'We Are One' – will take place at Swanage Youth Hostel on 23-27 July – details on the Unitarian website. There have been discussions about setting up a new residential weekend in Wales and a youth event in Scotland. Do get in touch if you would like to be involved in these initiatives.

I have been working on strengthening our flagship youth holiday – Five Days Away. This summer FDA is being expanded to six days so we are rebranding it as Fun Days Away (8-13 August at the Nightingale Centre) and we will be following *Our Whole Lives*, a course published by the UUA on sexuality, identity and relationships.

I am aware that the numbers of young people attending our youth weekends have fluctuated a great deal – anywhere between 12-35 – over the last few years. This, to an extent, is an inevitable phenomenon which is partly due to a diversity of responsibilities and commitments in the lives of young people. It may also be a symptom of poor communication between the Youth Department and families out in our districts, some of whom do not belong to a local congregation. Youth Panel members have been working closely to try to improve communication and publicity.

James Barry, one of our volunteer youth leaders, has offered his IT vision and creativity to ensure that all our youth events are posted on the Unitarian website and has been designing our very own youth website which will soon go online at [www.yuponline.org.uk](http://www.yuponline.org.uk) (yup stands for Young Unitarian People) which should help us reach out more directly to those who attend our events.

Another challenge for the Youth Programme is the need to strengthen our connection with BUYAN (British Unitarian Young Adult Network) for 18-35 year olds. It is of vital importance that we encourage our young people who age out of Senior Weekend to discover the wealth of support and events offered by BUYAN so that they remain part of the Unitarian community into young adulthood if they wish. Over the last few years we have resurrected Bridging Weekend, an event for the 16-21 age group. The feel of this event is very different from the other youth weekends with the participants, young

*(Continued on page 5)*



# The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest

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**"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001*

The Inquirer is published fortnightly by The Inquirer Publishing Company (2004), Registered Charity 1101039.

**Articles** express the views of their authors. Submissions are welcome and may be edited for content and length. They should be emailed or typed and should be the author's original work or be attributed appropriately.

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## Inquiring Words

May God bless you with discomfort ...

At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,

So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger ...

At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,

So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears ...

To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war,

So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them

And turn their pain to joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness ...

To believe that you can make a difference in this world,

So that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

— *Franciscan Benediction*

## Catching up with young people

The timing of this Inquirer is a bit odd. You are reading this after the General Assembly has finished. The big chalices and banners have been packed up; the books sold off and all the teacups washed. But, because of the press timetable, I am writing this before the GA has begun. So, you won't find news about the resolutions passed or the worship services in this issue. Look for that next time.

Still, this GA is (or was) dedicated to young people. And so is this issue of *The Inquirer*. There are stories about the weekend and five-day programmes that happen at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow. And, there are accounts of the inter-generational services at Godalming and at Wakefield, along with the first *Inquirer* column that I know of to be produced by a dog. Reg Barry – no doubt with his human's help – makes his writing debut on page 8.

There are so many fantastic photographs and stories about Unitarian young people, that another worthy story got pushed toward the back of the magazine. Take a look at Cliff Reed's review of Philip Pullman's 'The Good Man Jesus and The Scoundrel Christ' and see if you are moved to ask whether the esteemed author might have Unitarian tendencies – as the Oxford congregation did. (See page 8.)

There will be plenty of coverage of the annual meetings in the next few issues of *The Inquirer*. And, readers will get to hear from the young Unitarians, just as we attenders will (or will have done when you read this). They are conducting the worship service on the first night. No doubt they have a lot to share.

— MC Burns

## With thanks

This colour issue of *The Inquirer* was sponsored by Gill and Howard Hague, of Essex Church, Kensington.



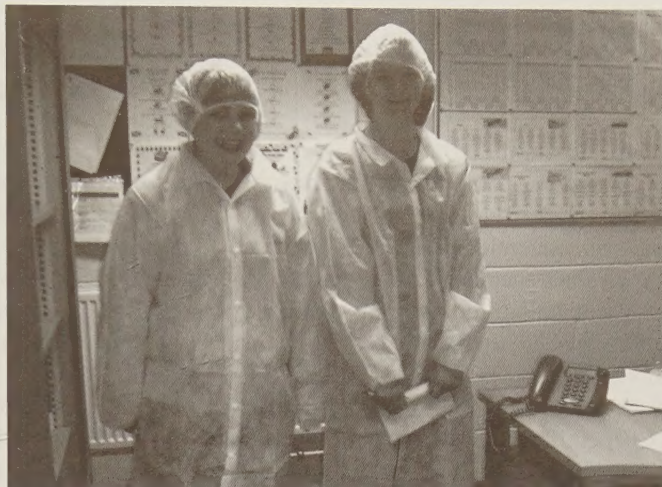
# A bumper year for Chalice Awards

By Mary Wightman

The Chalice Award is a scheme for young people set up as a resource for leaders, parents and inter-generational groups in Unitarian and Free Christian Communities.

At last year's General Assembly new pamphlets were introduced giving a full explanation of the work of the scheme and its possibilities for use with inter-generational groups. These pamphlets have also been distributed to all congregations and fellowships.

The scheme has a wide variety of interesting and appealing modules at four levels, Green, Bronze, Silver and Gold and, as the young people achieve each level, they are given an appropriate certificate until they reach the Gold when they are presented with either a gold chalice necklace or gold chalice badge. Should anyone wish, the new logo is available on transfers, which can be used on t-shirts and be presented by churches with the Green, Bronze, Silver and Gold certificates. The template is available from Essex Hall.



Two girls from the Dundee congregation visited a food factory as part of their work on the gold Chalice Award.



Young people in Altrincham recently received gold and bronze Chalice Awards from Mary Wightman (back row, centre).

The panel would highly recommend any community with young members to encourage them to take part in this scheme. If congregations or fellowships require any further information, a panel member could come and lead a workshop for leaders or a fun day of activities for children.

This year we have had a bumper crop of seven young people from Dukinfield, Dundee and Altrincham receiving their Gold Awards.

Mary Wightman is a member of the Chalice Awards Panel.

## Youth programme continues to develop

(Continued from page 3)

people and adults alike, taking full ownership of all ground rules and activities without any structured programme. The next Bridging Weekend will be taking place at The Nightingale Centre from 2-4 July.

Future challenges for the Youth Department include: developing training for our leaders, improving safeguarding procedures for all adults working with children and young people across our movement and creating new resources and course programmes for Unitarian youth work and RE activities at our churches, chapels and fellowships. Also we need to think of new ways of making our weekends accessible to children and young people with no Unitarian connection at all.

I would like to finish by thanking our main youth leaders for all their self-less sharing of time and inspirational leadership, without whom none of this would be possible. They include the Junior team: Vanessa Rothwell, Sue Howard, Louise Shatliffe, Ella Field and Chas Talbot, Inter team: Lorna Hill,

Kathy Faiers, Claire Maddocks, Eloise Williamson, Emma Lowe and Al Warhurst, Senior team: Sarah Warhurst, Jen Hazel, James Barry and Charlie Watts, Unikids: Liz Hill and Uniteenz: Mandy Richards. Sorry if I have forgotten to include anyone's name.

Also we are grateful to those trusts who continue to give generous grants to the youth programme. These include the Wood Green Trust, Hackney Trust and Stokes Croft Educational Foundation. Finally I want to personally thank Stella and all the staff at The Nightingale Centre for their hospitality and flexibility in hosting youth weekends.

I hope this big bubble of trust will continue to grow and provide much needed oxygen for young Unitarians. If you have any suggestions or comments or would like to volunteer your time and talents do contact me at [jharley@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:jharley@unitarian.org.uk).

The Rev John Harley is national youth co-ordinator of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.



# Best Practices: Inter-generational

## Godalming welcomes families with

By Louise Baumberg

As a child, being part of the community at my local Anglican church was a big part of my life. I grew up with Sunday school, tea and biscuits after church, fetes, ceilidhs, church youth club and a sense of being a valued member of that group. Six years ago I decided that I wanted something similar for my children – a supportive community of all ages where they could be surrounded by open minded people with values that they could learn from.

If there had been no provision for children at Godalming Unitarian Chapel, I would not have gone to even one service. Fortunately, there had been a children's programme running for a few years and intergenerational (family) services had recently been introduced. I had checked on the website and specifically planned to go along for the first time to a family service. Attending a completely unknown church for the first time with young children is quite scary – would they need to go to the toilet? Have a tantrum? Make loud, inappropriate comments? And if they did any of these things, what would these unknown Unitarians do? My imagination ran wild! At least in a family service I knew that the children (then aged 3 and 5) would be welcome throughout the service and we would not have to immediately try to settle them in an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar people for separate activities.

At Godalming Unitarians there is provision for children at two services each month. The usual pattern is that the children come into the beginning of the service and after the chalice lighting, a story and song they leave for their separate activities in the hall. While we have developed and changed these activities over time, I am sure they remain broadly similar to what is offered in other Unitarian children's programmes.

What may be different is that approximately once every two months we continue to hold family services. What is a family service? At a family service you should expect something a little bit different. The basic bones of a service are often recognisable – chalice lighting, hymns or songs, quiet prayer or meditation, stories – but there is usually more. Our family services tend to appeal to all the senses – touch, taste, hearing, sight, smell (actually we haven't yet done anything involving smell – an idea for a future service per-



*Children and adults at Godalming worked together on a social action project, which grew out of a family service.*

haps!). There is much less sitting and listening and much more *ing*. A memorable service a few years ago involved the congregation all holding hands and singing a song with actions – the climax of a long story about a monster and villagers picking fruit. I smile to remember it but any description I give would be totally inadequate – you had to be there!

A key element of a family service is participation. Sometimes just the children who participate in an activity, sometimes everyone needs to join in. We might write down thoughts for a prayer, join in a ritual, change places for a different point of view. The children found bugs around the chapel (Darwin), arranged stones in ever-increasing circles (love), pulled presents out of a bag (Christmas), filled up cups of water from the tap (things we take for granted), and ended in storytelling (everything from kindness to seeds).

As we think more about Social Action at Godalming Unitarian

## You can talk about Batman, but don't c

By Steve Carlile

Here at Wakefield Westgate we have, in the past, had a Sunday school, and while this worked very well there are a number of issues. Children are part of the wider congregation, so sometimes the idea of filtering them off into another room can give them the message that they are a separate congregation. Here a decision was made that it was important that children and their needs were put first, and because of the problems caused by afternoon services (our default position at the time) a decision was made to hold the first service of the month in a morning. This service is in many respects as traditional as the afternoon service, though care is taken to make it accessible to children through careful use of words, and perhaps having a story aimed at children rather than a more highbrow reading. Bill Darlison's book, 'The Shortest Distance', has proved invaluable as a

resource, though of course there's a whole world of books and poems that have, or can be given meaning, that can be understood clearly by children as well as the older members of the congregation.

Perhaps the key to doing services for children is that if they can understand by children, then the battle is already won, but it's as important as well that adults are given something to think about on the side. A child may learn about loss through The Velveteen Rabbit. Though the adult will have a similar, but totally different thought process, both will be experiencing, learning and growing. Children may be given a task to do, particularly if an address is aimed at adults, and this is a good opportunity for the children to share their viewpoint, and their skills, with the wider congregation. It's been good to have an opportunity to have a flipchart discussion at a recent service on the subject of goodies and baddies the children



# onal worship benefits all services for all

Family services have enabled all ages to work together to help around the world. In November, our family service was even hands-on than usual. We had a brief period of worship in the hall and an introduction to three social action projects then we all gathered together in the hall, making and writing Christmas cards to individuals and communities for Amnesty, decorating boxes filled and sent to Eastern Europe, and making a Christmas card for a Tanzanian girl that the children's programme sponsor. We must talk about it, we did it. All ages were together in a new way different from a service or social time. Fair Trade Fortnight was the theme of a recent family service, which was as interactive as possible. Everyone particularly enjoyed the chocolate meditation despite the fact that there was only one square each! Luckily we had a Fair Trade stall afterwards and more chocolate was purchased and consumed later – all in a good cause.

Family services are the perfect way to include everyone in worship and be welcoming to families without having to set up a separate programme. But be prepared to do things a bit differently when you invite participation, be prepared for unexpected things to happen. During a family service in my childhood I remember the vicar asking 'Who puts the milk bottles on your doorstep?', a young congregation member who could obviously see where we were going with this line of questioning chipped in straight away with the answer 'God', leaving the vicar rather ahead of himself. Be prepared to find out that children also know more than you think – if you do plan to have a Fair Trade themed service please note that plants grow on *plants* and not *trees*.

It's not just the children who get a lot out of intergenerational services – a more participatory service engages adults as well. A family service can bring out the kid in anybody from 0 – 99 years old!

*Louise Baumberg is the committee member who has responsibility for children and families at Godalming Unitarians. This is another photo of Godalming's inter-generational programme on page 11.*

## b services down

On the other hand with their knowledge of Batman and Harry Potter, children are discussing the good and bad aspects of water, fire, the police and the environment. At all levels there is an opportunity of involvement and I think that this is good for the congregation as a whole. On the other hand, I'd like to say that because a service is aimed at adults, not all the adults in the congregation may know what's going on. I went to university, or studied theology, and am not always au fait with the minutiae of Unitarian history, so I can't fully understand why children might feel baffled. Hopefully the child-friendly services will help them the message that they are part of a larger congregation, and hopefully preachers realize that you don't have to 'dumb down' family services accessible.

*Steve Carlile leads inter-generational worship at Westgate Chapel, Wakefield.*

## Learning from each other

By Sheena Gabriel

Our denomination with its tradition of 'order' in worship has handed down the hymn-prayer-sermon sandwich, but we are increasingly questioning whether this is the only way to worship. Family services invite us to explore different perspectives, which are less about the 'head' and more about the 'heart', less about the spoken word and more about the experience, less about the 'preacher' and more about the congregation.

Creating services that will keep the attention of small children, whilst not patronising adults, can be a challenge. But it is worth the extra effort. Traditional services where children stay only for the 'children's story', create a distinction between 'child' and 'adult'. When the children leave for their activities, sometimes there is the unspoken feeling of "now we've got the story – the 'fun' part – over with, us adults can settle down quietly to the 'grown-up', serious part of worship". Family services turn this upside down – everything is available to everyone – stories, songs, prayers, meditations – people aged 0-90, sharing the same experience – even though that experience is apprehended on many different levels.

And this way we learn from each other – adults are 'allowed' to have fun and children are taken seriously as equal members in creating worship. One of the most moving moments for me within a family service, was a meditation on loving kindness led by Louise Baumberg. We adults were told to keep our 'eyes closed' and guided through a spoken meditation, with the gentle sounds of music and movement in the background; we opened our eyes to see a mandala of pebbles – circles within circles – in the middle of the worship space – arranged by the children to represent the expanding ripples of loving-kindness: now that was profound worship!

Family services allow us to question our 'norms' of worship – if we can do things differently when children are present – what about at other times? Do we always need a sermon? Dare we rearrange the chairs? Can stories and visual aids enhance the experience of adults? Can we lay aside our adult preconceptions and see things afresh through the eyes of a child? Must we always be serious and sober in worship?

The Rev Scotty McLennan, a Unitarian Universalist minister says this:

'To find your religion, it's not enough just to open one's mind and think deeply. ... Religion grows from the heart as much as the head and it cries out to fuse body and mind ... Faith is an orientation of the whole personality, a total response ... your religion is something you not only think about, but also sing, dance, eat, paint and sculpt. To find your religion you must engage all of your senses. You should feel it as well as explain it, hear it as well as see it, taste it as well as smell it.'

And this, for me, sums up what family worship is all about.  
*Sheena Gabriel is lay leader of Godalming Unitarians.*



# Reg, a canine youth, has his say

By Reg Barry

For two-foots, most of them are small, but WOW how they can run like me in the grass! Not like master, but he's getting on a bit these days. I would think he must be nearly 8 now! But these young ones, they keep going and going – it's great. They have lots to learn still of course, but I try, I mean take 'fetch' – they have no idea. They chase some round smelly bit of plastic around, I brought them several bits of small tree to show them what you are meant to do, but they didn't get it – obviously still too young. But I don't really mind, they are still much more fun than the big two-foots. The best thing is that these youngsters understand 'the pack'. All four-foots understand packs, it's too scary to be on your own these days. Often my 'pack' is just master and me. He barks like it's a big pack, but often I turn round and realise it is only the two of us. But these little two-foots are a *real* pack, they run, woof, feed and even 'lift-leg' together. Mind you, they can't work out who is leader, one minute it's one, then another, then another. It seems to me it's just the one that howls first. They do that until the big two-foots come, then, they go like puppies. It's when they are all



Reg

together, we really do know who is pack-leader – mind you it's confusing because she is the smallest big two-foot, but she's the loudest no question, so I expect that is why she runs the pack!

Like all two-foots, the little ones have much to learn about sniffing. I can just about work out who is who before dark, then next day they come down with completely different unpleasant scents that makes them smell all the same! It doesn't seem to worry them, maybe because they don't even know how to sniff or even where to do it. They are a bit better at face-licking, well it's a kind of licking I think that some of them try. Cuddling – yes they are good at that too, but it never seems to last long 'cos that's when I see master getting angry and the little ones run off. But they must love it here 'cos they always

seem to come back. I love it too, even though most of the stuff goes on over my head – but I do know about fun and there is lots of that here – I've got an instinct for that!

*Reg Barry is a Ditchling Unitarian and frequent canine participant in youth activities at Great Hucklow, mostly in the company of his human, James Barry.*

## Could Philip Pullman be a Unitarian?

*Prior to publication of his book, 'The Good Man Jesus and The Scoundrel Christ' the Manchester College Oxford Chapel Society Publicity Group sent local author Philip Pullman this letter:*

Dear Philip Pullman:

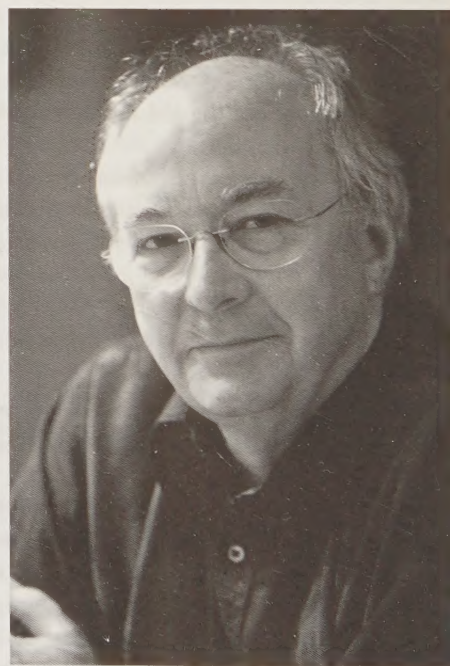
Your views about the Christian faith were rarely out of the news in 2009, and you have probably been the target of many earnest attempts to convince you of the rightness of fundamentalist dogma. But you might be interested to learn that there is at least one religious community which shares your views about the humanity of Jesus.

"Unitarians honour the moral teachings of Jesus, but do not worship him. Since the foundation of our faith in the 17th century, we have rejected the doctrines of Original Sin and Atonement, preferring to believe in the innate potential for good in every human being, and refusing to project responsibility for our personal redemption on to a mythical sacrificial figure. Although we try to live by the precepts of Jesus, we don't believe that Christianity has a monopoly on religious truth; so we seek inspiration from the texts of all the world's religions, and we reject the notion of priestly authority: we recognise no authority higher than that of the individual conscience.

"It is not easy to define Unitarian beliefs, because we don't have a fixed creed. But enclosed with this letter are a few pamphlets about our values. More information is available at [www.unitarians.org.uk](http://www.unitarians.org.uk). Oxford Unitarians look forward with interest to the publication of your new book (*The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*), and we would be pleased to welcome you at one of our services of worship, which are held each Sunday at 11 am in the chapel of Harris Manchester College in Mansfield Road."

The chapel society received the following response:

*Thank you for your letter and the leaflets about Unitarianism. I was aware of your presence, and knew a little about the valuable work that Unitarians have done. As for my forthcoming book about Jesus, yours is the forty-fifth letter I've received about it, and the first positive one, which made a pleasant change. I hope that when you read it you will find it not unsympathetic, but I'm encouraged in that hope by the evident intelligence and open-mindedness of everything I've read about the Unitarian position. I don't think I'll be joining you for worship quite yet, though, Philip Pullman*



Philip Pullman



# Pullman's Jesus: More than a story

Unitarians may find much to like in Phillip Pullman's controversial book about Jesus says **Cliff Reed**. But it does have some flaws.

It used to be said of 19<sup>th</sup>-century liberal Christians, engaged in the quest for the historical Jesus, that they were really looking down a two-thousand year-old well and seeing their own faces reflected back at them. It could be said that, in this book, Pullman is doing much the same thing – only the Jesus looking back at him is on the way to becoming a 21<sup>st</sup>-century secular humanist. He is a teacher of humane, compassionate ethical values who finally discovers that there is no God to back them up, no coming Kingdom to vindicate his life's work. God is, "like a grandfather who...has died", laments Pullman's Jesus in Gethsemane, and his prayer becomes a mere, "whisper into silence".

Novelists as diverse as Charles Dickens, Nikos Kazantzakis, Michael Moorcock and Jim Crace (just to name some from my own bookshelves!), have had a go at telling (or re-telling) the story of Jesus. Each has had their own point to make. And, of course, this was also true of the authors of the four canonical gospels who, while not writing works of fiction, were not writing factually, literally or impartially either! Philip Pullman is in good company, then, with this new book. His own agenda, which is a bit too thinly-veiled at times, is to acknowledge Jesus the courageous, radical, highly-principled teacher and reformer, while lamenting the hierarchical, doctrinally-obsessed and oppressive power structure that was afterwards constructed in his name. But, as it says on the back of the dust-jacket, "This is a Story"!

But perhaps that statement is a bit disingenuous. You cannot write any book about Jesus – fiction or non-fiction – without it being a bit more than just a story. The Christian religion, whether you like it or not, occupies too pervasive a position in our culture for that! That's why, I suspect, a thoughtful and serious secular humanist like Philip Pullman feels the need to write a book like this at all! He knows that the Christian story and its attendant mythology, art and literature – even its basic ethical values – are just too important to be ignored. But while he wants to rescue what is of human worth within them, he is also concerned to attack, not only the dross of superstition, but also the institutional Church – especially, perhaps in its 'imperial' Roman Catholic form. It seems no accident that Pullman's Jesus, in Gethsemane, foresees a time when, "...any priest who wants to indulge his secret appetites, his greed, his lust, his cruelty, will find himself like a wolf in a field of lambs..." No prizes for guessing what that's all about!

The wish to make a distinction between Jesus and 'the Church' is a very old one. It is certainly an exercise with which our own forbears in the Radical Reformation were in sympathy, if by 'the Church' was meant an exclusive, 'priest-ridden' pyramid, with popes, cardinals and bishops at the top, and the laity very much at the bottom! Indeed, it is an exercise with

which many present-day Unitarians are probably still in sympathy – which is why they may read at least parts of Pullman's very readable book with approval!

I must say though, that I found myself wishing that Pullman had been prepared to acknowledge his sources, and to tell the reader where he had been true to these and where he had altered them for his own purposes. In places, large chunks are lifted more or less verbatim from the gospels, but elsewhere he has taken an incident or a parable and re-written or re-arranged it to make his own point. I'm not saying he shouldn't have done this, but I can't help feeling that the reader should have been told about it. And there is another point about his sources which, if only for information and interest, might have been acknowledged somewhere in the book.

Besides the canonical gospels, Pullman also draws on the wealth of non-canonical, apocryphal and 'heretical' documents from the early Christian centuries. It is from some of these that he draws the basic premise of his book, namely, that Jesus had a twin brother. In Pullman's story, this twin is nicknamed 'Christ' by his mother. His actual name is not

given. 'Christ' grows up in his brother's shadow and, indeed, becomes his shadow-self. Although devoted to Jesus, 'Christ' also takes on some of the darker roles in the story, prompted by a mysterious 'stranger' who he thinks is an angel. 'Christ', with the help of one of the apostles, also becomes the recorder of Jesus' life and teachings, but does so with an agenda rather different from that of Jesus himself. It is through 'Christ', the story goes, that the institutional Church comes into being. And while the Church preserves some of the teachings of Jesus, it compromises and submerges them in its own will to power.

In John's gospel we are introduced to Thomas the Twin (famous for his 'doubting'!), but we are not told whose twin he is. In some Gnostic Christian sources, though, we are! And bearing in mind the character Pullman creates and places at the heart of his book, it is worth noting where the basic idea comes from. The 3<sup>rd</sup>-century 'Book of Thomas the Contender', for example, opens with this declaration:

"The secret words that the Saviour spoke to Judas Thomas which I, even I Mathaias, wrote down – I was walking, listening to them speak with one another. The Saviour said, 'Brother Thomas...since it has been said that you are my twin and true companion, examine yourself that you may understand who you are, in what way you exist, and how you will come to be.'"

'The Nag Hammadi Library in English', E. J. Brill, 1984, pp.188-9

Pullman gives us an intriguing tale, which no doubt will upset some. But, although he gives us his own personal (and sometimes overly polemical) slant on a familiar story, his deliberately subversive version actually has deeper roots in Christianity's multi-faceted beginnings than the general reader is likely to realise – or he tells us.

**'The Good Man Jesus and The Scoundrel Christ', £14-99, published by Canongate Books Ltd. ISBN: 1847678254**

*The Rev Cliff Reed is minister at Ipswich.*

## PHILIP PULLMAN THE GOOD MAN JESUS AND THE SCOUNDREL CHRIST



# Honorary member June Bell will be missed

## June Bell 1919-2010

June Bell, Past President of the Unitarian General Assembly for 1980-1981, Honorary Assembly member, friend and counsellor to countless Unitarians at home and around the world died in her adopted city of Edinburgh on 17 March, aged 91 years.

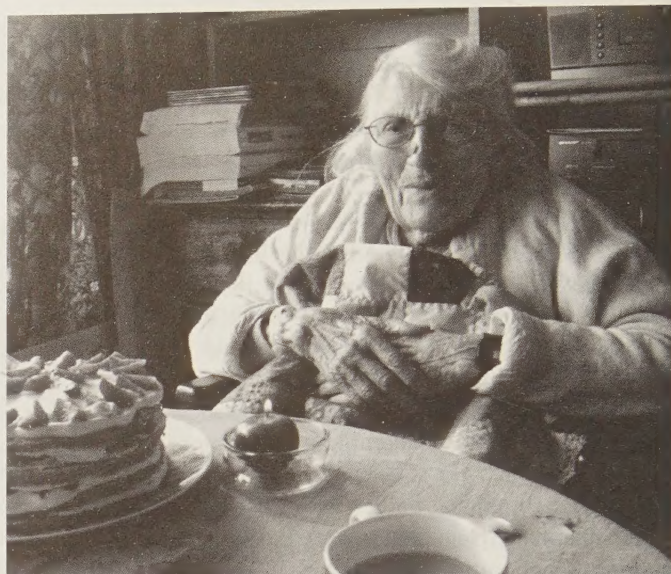
Born in Essex (Chingford) and raised in Sussex (Bexhill-on-Sea), June had a high Anglican religious upbringing which she shed on reaching Cambridge and finding Unitarians and the Fellowship of Youth (now the Foy Society). As an undergraduate at Girton College she read biology and taught it for a while in Tunbridge Wells. Then, after a spell in a Brighton pathology laboratory, she progressed to University College, London as a medical student, returning to Cambridge for her PhD research into migraine. At Cambridge, June met and married Jimmy Bell, a widower with two children, Robert and Elspet. Jimmy was then appointed to Edinburgh University's Roslin Institute. Their two daughters, Jenny and Lesley, were both Edinburgh born. Jimmy attended St. Columba's by the Castle Scottish Episcopal Church while June found St. Mark's Unitarian Church. Wallace Tavener, classically humanist and politically radical, was the minister. June became more and more involved in the church's life. When Bruce Findlow succeeded as minister June became church secretary and, while appreciating some of the causes of the ensuing disruption, she remained loyal to St. Mark's.

After Jimmy's death and when family responsibilities were lighter, June found work curating bones and demonstrating physiology at Edinburgh's famous medical school. Later she did psychotherapy training at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital and a year's General Practice training at Pathhead in East Lothian. But June's real gift was in counselling and she kept a few paying clients well into her eighties.

June became more and more involved in Unitarian General Assembly matters. She joined the Assembly's ministry committee and interview panel for would-be ministers. Despite a distinctly this-worldly personal philosophy, she found high value in the pastoral aspects of ministry and contributed enthusiastically to Assembly commissions on ministerial training. Several current Unitarian ministers have expressed their profound gratitude not just for June's careful and considerate interviewing but also for her generous counselling in times of personal crisis.

My own first encounter with June was in 1964 when I was a young first year student at the Unitarian College and June was the College Visitor. Little then did I know that a decade later I would actually become June's own minister at St Mark's; nor that my ministry there would last for more than 30 years. A more loyal and supportive church member I could not have had, June was involved in every aspect of church life – in worship which she would occasionally lead in my absence, in small groups, which were her much preferred context, and in committees where, armed with her small clip-board and paper, she was an inveterate note-taker. However, she never did the church flowers and never made the after service coffee!

Her chief joy both at St. Mark's and at Family Holiday Conference/Unitarian Experience Week – an annual therapeutic must for June – and for the Unitarian Renewal Group was community dramas which she would write and produce, cos-



June Bell enjoyed her 90th birthday, which she celebrated with a tea party. Photo submitted by Andrew M Hill.

tume and firmly direct. She also enjoyed old songs and wrote new ones in doggerel rhyme which a few years ago – for her 80th birthday – St Mark's gathered together and published as *A Peal of Bells*.

June's other great therapeutic joy was the natural world. She loved her garden, and she loved her cats, and she loved her home-grown fruit and vegetables, and she rescued discarded paper napkins with which to clean her frying pan. She also loved David Attenborough's television programmes. Also June could never live without a view. A large upper flat was always better than a house with no view. From the bed to which she was mostly confined in these later years she had a most impressive view across south Edinburgh towards Blackford Hill and the Royal Mile.

Walking became difficult and June eventually had five replacement hips and her example of living with them was an inspiration. But there was also her wrist which, in its special way provided an epitome of June's approach to life. Whatever was wrong with the wrist required surgical intervention and June insisted on being awake and aware so that she could see the 'innards' and observe the procedure. This exemplified June's brutal honesty about herself. Pretence and claptrap was never allowed to get in her way and it was this quality which, above all others made her of such significance to so many people. June's gift was to enable others to be honest and truthful with themselves.

There was a goodly gathering of mostly local people – but also including Unitarian General Assembly President Bob Wightman and Mary Wightman – for her funeral at Mortonhall Crematorium, Edinburgh on Friday 26 March. The service, for which she had made instructions several years ago, was led by the present St Mark's minister, the Rev Maud Robinson, while I gave the eulogy. A thanksgiving service for June's long life will be held at St Mark's Unitarian Church in central Edinburgh on Saturday 10 July to which all who would like to be present are invited.

*By the Rev Andrew M Hill, retired Unitarian minister.*



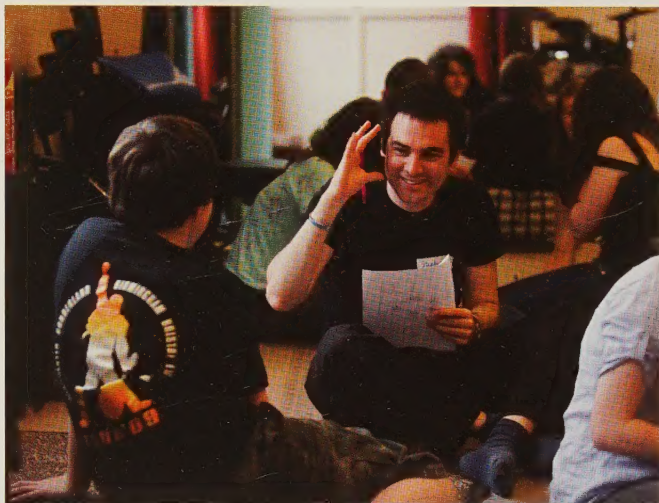


*At Five Days Away, in August, there were times for contemplation and for worship. Photo by James Barry*

# Young Unitarians' scrapbook



*There's always time for a game of footie at Hucklow, as these Inter Weekend participants found in November. Photo by James Barry*



*Youngsters think about the big issues – faith, identity and relationships and have the opportunity to talk things over with Unitarian leaders such as Stephen Lingwood, minister at Bolton. Photo by James Barry*



*At Godalming, children do some of the more traditional Sunday school activities, in addition to participating in and, even leading, worship.*



# Catching up with young people



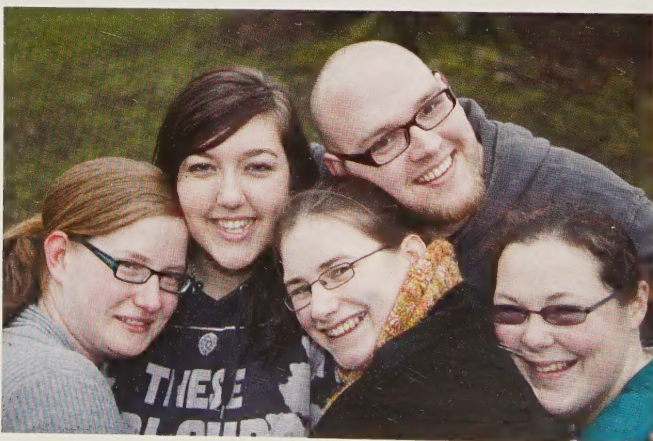
*Skill and trust exercises are incorporated into the activities at Five Days Away for young people. Photo by James Barry*



*Unitarian youngsters participate in worship beyond the hymn sandwich and learn to conduct services on Junior, Inter and Senior Weekends. Photo by James Barry*



*Youngsters at a Senior Weekend find a creative outlet for their ideas. Photo by James Barry*



*There are a lot of group hugs at Hucklow. Photo by James Barry*



*Reg the dog conducts a staff meeting during Five Days Away at Great Hucklow. Photo by James Barry*